American Indians and the Public School System: A Case Study of the Northern Utes

BY KIM M. GRUENWALD

THE EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN INDIANS in boarding schools have been the subject of many historical monographs, but the experiences of Indian children in public schools have not been the focus of any major study. This gap in our exploration of twentieth-century Indian history should be redressed because the public school classroom has been a major meeting ground between Indian and white cultures since the early 1900s. For most of the twentieth century, more than 50 percent of Indian children have attended public rather than boarding schools, and the issue of public education has been a key ingredient in all federal Indian policy decisions. At the local level, the many mutually exclusive goals of Indians and whites are laid bare as both struggle to educate Indian children.

At the national level, the federal government sought to use public schools as agents of assimilation in the early 1900s. Policymakers believed that if Indian children mingled with whites in school, their parents might join the white community in local education organizations. If, through public schooling, the Indian students and their parents would assimilate into the dominant culture, the tribes would disintegrate and the need for reservations with them.[1]

The federal government knew white prejudice would hamper its attempt to assimilate the Indians, but the Indian Bureau also believed that "association" would override prejudice. The bureau planned to silence objections by paying tuition for the students since Indian land was nontaxable and raised no money for local school districts. Local officials favored this. They claimed that white patrons in rural districts

Dr. Gruenwald is assistant professor of history, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio. She wishes to thank Charles S. Peterson, Clyde F. Milner II, and Floyd A. O'Neil for their support while she was researching her master's thesis, "The Ute Indians and the Public School System: An Historical Analysis, 1900–1985," at Utah State University, on which this article is based, and Forrest Cuch and Roger Beckstead for access to crucial files.

[1] Irving G. Hendrick, "The Federal Campaign for the Admission of Indian Children into Public Schools, 1890–1934," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 5 (1981), no. 3, pp. 16–17. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C., 1906), pp. 41–42 (hereinafter cited as *Annual Report* followed by the year); *Annual Report* (1914), pp. 7–9; (1913), p. 25; (1915), p. 4; (1918), p. 28; (1929), p. 6.

were nearly as poor as the Indians, making the burden of providing school for nontaxpaying Indians even greater. This argument had some validity in Utah's Uintah and Duchesne counties where, due to depressed economic conditions, public schools were poorly supported. Basin schools closed a month early in 1921 because of lack of funds. The federal government's drive succeeded; in 1914 public school districts across the country enrolled more Indians than Indian Bureau schools did for the first time.[2]

Albert H. Kneale, Uintah and Ouray reservation superintendent from 1915 to 1925, strove to be the first in that office to promote association between white and Indian children in the classroom. In 1921 he optimistically stated:

> If I can put these Indian children into the public schools among the white boys and girls and let them fight and learn that 25 cents is a quarter of a dollar, by the end of six years I can abolish the Indian agency altogether, for the Indian population will be gradually assimilated in the affairs of the communities and the Indians will be able to take care of themselves.[3]

But if Kneale approved of the mingling of the races, he had to report that local whites had other ideas. Whites commonly believed that the Utes did not want to progress—they willingly lived in filth and squalor with blankets, war paint, and long hair. Gambling was said to be "bred in the bone" among Utes, and they engaged in common-law marriages. In addition, measles and scarlet fever ran rampant at the crowded Whiterocks boarding school making whites fear for the health of their own children. School officials did not openly oppose Indian enrollment, but "there was revolt on the part of teachers and white patrons." When one teacher refused to allow Indian students into her classroom, the county superintendent backed her up. White parents at another school turned away children, saying that they had trachoma although the agency physician gave them a clean bill of health.[4]

Not surprisingly, the Indians did not seem to want the races to

[2] *Annual Report* (1910), p. 15; (1911), p. 27; (1914), p, 7; *Vernal Express*, April 21, 1921.

[3] *Salt Lake Telegram*, February 24, 1921; Superintendent's Report, Uintah and Ouray Agency, 1921, in Superintendents' Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports from Field Jurisdictions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1907–1938, Uintah and Ouray, National Archives, RG75, rolls 158 and 159, microfilm, Uintah County Library, Vernal, Utah (hereinafter these reports will be cited as Superintendent's Report followed by the year). Note: the preferred spelling for natural features is "Uinta" Mountains or Basin; for political and other designations it is "Uintah" County, School District, or Reservation.

[4] Superintendent's Report, 1910–15, 1921, 1922, 1929. Superintendent of the Uintah and Ouray Agency to Earl Thompson, April 19, 1920, and to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 1, 1920, box 19, in Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1897–1912, 1916–52, National Archives, Denver Branch, RG75, Bureau of Indian Affairs (hereinafter cited as Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence).

mingle either. Before schools strictly enforced attendance, one reservation superintendent reported that Utes living close to public schools enrolled their children there but did not send them, knowing no one would come looking for them. He felt that parents on both sides objected to whites and Indians attending the same schools.[5]

But Kneale also cited a different kind of example of the Indians' attitude in 1917. That summer the reservation had its first successful agricultural fair for Indians. In the past when non-Indians were in charge, most Indians did not attend. But when Indians managed the exhibits and games, nearly all the Utes attended and, according to Kneale, enjoyed and benefited from it. The Utes actively resisted events planned for them by whites but were interested in programs that could improve their lives when they themselves ran them.[6]

Despite poor race relations, the number of Utes in Uinta Basin public schools increased in the 1930s. Knowing that many children did not attend school at all, the new reservation superintendent used money as a lever. In 1932 the Uintah and Ouray Agency announced that next year tuition would be paid according to actual daily attendance rather than in lump sums to the districts. By 1935 over 100 Ute children attended public schools, and the number stayed over 100 until the 1950s. In 1934 the superintendent credited this jump to the interest public school officials showed in Indian students after the Indian Bureau strengthened the criteria for receiving tuition funds.[7]

An important turning point in federal Indian policy occurred in 1933 with the appointment of John Collier to the post of Indian commissioner. He wanted to stop the break-up of reservations and help tribes reestablish their old social structures. In the area of education he continued the old policy of pushing to educate children in public schools—but for a new purpose. The federal government had established boarding schools to separate Indian children from their homes to facilitate the transmission of white culture, but Collier wanted to increase Indian enrollment in public schools so that children would not be torn from their homes, allowing Indians to socialize their children in their own way.[8]

Collier also urged Congress to pass the Johnson–O'Malley Act in

[5] Superintendent's Report, 1911, 1920, 1928.

[6] Ibid., 1911, 1917.

[7] Ibid., 1932, 1934; William. B. Showalter to David Gourley, April 19, 1941, box 19, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

[8] Hendrick, "The Federal Campaign," p. 29; Donald K. Sharpes, "Federal Education for the American Indian," *Journal of American Indian Education* 19 (October 1979): 20.

John Collier, commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1932–45. National Archives photograph.

1934. Unlike the old policy of paying tuition to school districts, the new act let the bureau make contracts with the states to provide funding for special programs to meet Indian needs. Utah school districts used most of the Johnson–O'Malley funds to provide lunch for Indian students.[9]

Despite the federal government's about-face, local attitudes did not change. During the depression, school districts still demanded that Indian children in poor health be sent to the reservation's Whiterocks boarding school. Crowded public schools also transferred Ute students to the boarding school because whites objected to them. In 1934, 58 percent of whites in the Basin depended on relief, and many blamed this on the fact that Indian land could not be taxed for the good of the county. Since poor economic conditions kept many whites from paying taxes, little money was available for schooling children of any race.[10]

Resentment and hostility increased. The reservation superintendent received complaints that bus drivers passed up Indian students at assigned stops or failed to wait for children running to catch the bus. One bus driver wrote that he could not keep whites and Indians from quarreling. Whites taunted and jeered at the Utes, telling them they had no right to ride the bus because they paid no taxes. Four Indian students refused to ride the bus, and their parents demanded that the district provide another way for them to attend school.[11]

[9] Ibid.

[10] Superintendent's Report, 1935; Coulsen and Geneva Wright, "Indian-White Relations in the Uintah Basin," *Utah Humanities Quarterly* 2 (October 1948): 348–51; L. W. Page to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 12, 1933, and John Collier to Grace Lambert, January 6, 1934, box 19; Paul L. Fickinger to Roy Adams, November 30, 1938, and Samuel H. Thompson to Supt. C.C. Wright, August 9, 1939, box 20; Roy Adams to Lewis W. Page, August 27, 1935, box 18; H.M. Tidwell to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 25, 1930, box 19, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

[11] A. Alwyn Call to C. C. Wright, March 7, 1937; C. C. Wright to A. A. Call, February 20, 1937; C. C. Wright to Charles Glines, September 24, 1940; Charles Glines to C. C. Wright, September 23, 1940, box 21, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

Many teachers demonstrated an open prejudice that made the Indian children feel unwelcome. A depression-era non-Indian student in the Uinta Basin gave the following example:

> I remember one of the hymns we were required to sing in the school. It was from an old Protestant hymnal. . . . It went:
>
> "Let the Indian and the Negro,
> Let the rude barbarian hear,
> Of the glories of the kingdom. . . ."
>
> These lyrics did not wash with the Indian students. When they would not sing those words, the teacher would become incensed.[12]

A shift in local tactics did occur in the early 1940s when Basin residents began talking about building a consolidated public high school for the students of Uintah and Duchesne counties. Schools at that time were small, isolated, and run down; so a new school with more facilities in a central location would serve the children better. Non-Indians wanted the federal government to provide one-third of the funding through the Indian Bureau because the school would benefit the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. In their proposal, the school districts played to new federal attitudes toward Indian culture by saying the new high school would strive to meet Indian needs with culturally relevant material, a promise that remained unfulfilled.[13]

The federal government and the school districts haggled for the next decade. The districts argued that 80 percent of their land was nontaxable, but the federal government said too few Indian students would benefit—over 3,000 non-Indian children would attend the school, compared with approximately 300 Utes. The Indian Bureau complained that other federal agencies would have to deal with the government-owned land problem, but the districts kept applying to the Indian Bureau for the funds. In 1947 all parties concerned (except the Utes) finally came to an agreement. The Indian Bureau contributed $250,000, the counties contributed $150,000 each, and the new school was to "be available to all Indian children of the districts on the same terms as other children, without payment of Federal tuition."[14] But with the passage of federal impact legislation in 1952

[12] Floyd A. O'Neil, "The Indian New Deal: An Overview," in *Indian Self-Rule: First Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan,* ed. Kenneth R. Philp (Salt Lake City, 1986), p. 43.

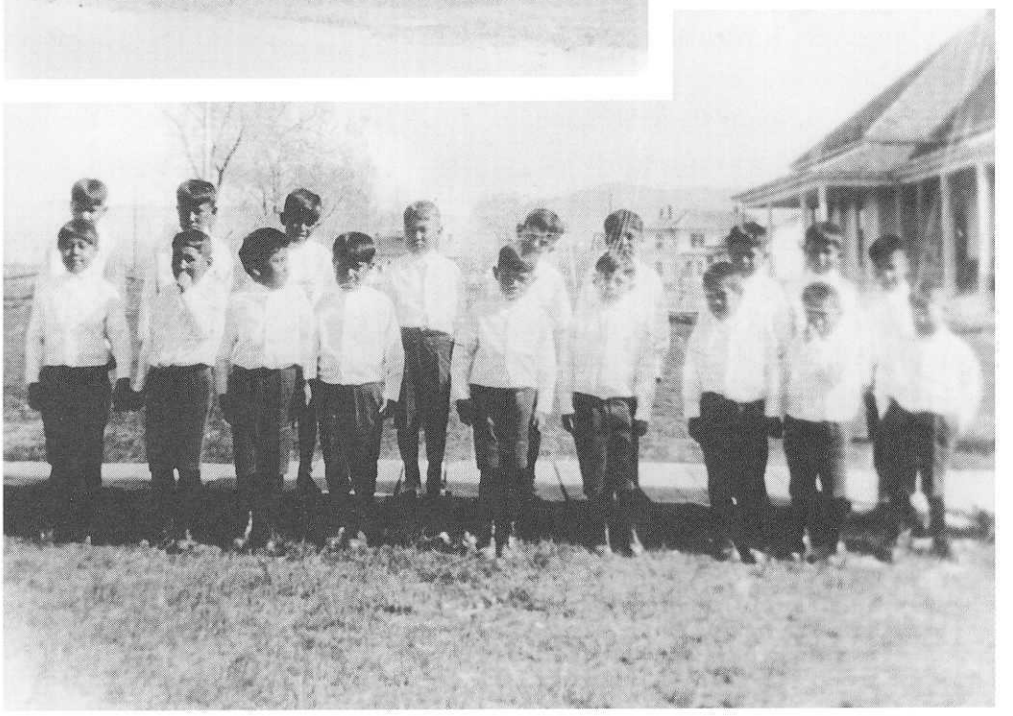
[13] Committee of the State Department of Public Instruction, "A Survey of Duchesne County School District and Uintah County School District, 1941," box 17, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

[14] Ibid., pp. 31–42; D. S. Myer to Area Directors and Reservation Superintendents, October 19, 1950, box 21; Willard W. Beatty to Forrest R. Stone, May 23, Stone to John S. Boyden, February 26, 1947, Stone to Ernest L. Wilkinson, April 3, 1946, box 18, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

and 1954, the school districts once again received funds to compensate them for lost taxes.

Inset: *Whiterocks school, ca. 1940s.*

Below: *Young Ute boys in uniform at the Whiterocks boarding school. Both photographs courtesy of the Regional History Center, Uintah County Public Library, Vernal.*



By the 1940s the boarding school at Whiterocks needed major renovation. With the new high school available, all parties concerned (except the Utes) decided to close it down. Ute public school enrollment jumped from 128 to 404 in the three years prior to 1950.[15] By 1952 the boarding school had closed completely, and the federal government finally attained its goal of enrolling nearly all Ute children in the Uinta Basin in the state's public school system.

[15] A. Alwyn Call to Roy Adams, December 14, 1951, and Harold M. Lundell to Adams, March 6, 1952, box 10; Adams to Ralph M. Gelvin, April 8, 1952, box 19; Stone to Gelvin, March 9, 1951, and Charles B. Emery to Walter V. Woehkle, February 26, 1951, box 21, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

After World War II the Indian policy pendulum swung back to assimilation. Under Indian commissioner Dillon S. Myer the federal government planned to terminate its traditional responsibilities for the welfare of Indian nations. He wanted Indians to move to cities where they could learn to make their way in the mainstream economy without government help. As in the earlier eras of assimilation and the New Deal, the Indian Bureau expected public school educators to work toward the federal government's goal for the Indian nations.[16]

With the addition of over 250 new Ute students, the local school system immediately showed signs of strain. The districts needed new rooms and more teachers to relieve the overload; moreover, even veteran teachers had little experience in dealing with Indian children. The districts asked the federal government for new calculations of the amount of aid they were to receive, but officials told them to submit a report and "we will see what we can do."[17]

The Indians had difficulty with the changes as well. Parents who had counted on the boarding school to provide room, board, and clothing for their children were suddenly confronted with paying for all of that themselves. Prior to the 1950s many Ute Indians were destitute. Although in the 1940s the average family size was over six members, most Utes lived in two-room frame houses or log cabins, and some still lived in tepees.[18]

Two economic factors helped the Utes cope for a short time. First, in the 1940s oil was discovered on the reservation, and by 1951, the income from leases was substantial. Second, in 1951 the Utes won a suit against the federal government worth $17,000,000. The tribe used the judgement to pay debts they owed to the government, to start recreation and housing programs, and for payments of $4,000 per person from 1951 to 1954.[19]

Ute children failed at the new high school in Roosevelt, receiving mostly Ds and Fs in their classes. In 1951 only three of twelve Indian seniors were eligible for graduation, and thirty-one of forty-

[16] Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians,* 2 vols. (Lincoln, Neb., 1984), 2:1060–61.

[17] A. Alwyn Call to Roy Adams, December 14, 1951, and Harold M. Lundell to Adams, March 6, 1952, box 10; Adams to Ralph M. Gelvin, April 8, 1952, box 19; Forrest R. Stone to Gelvin, March 26, 1951, and Charles B. Emery to Walter V. Woehkle, February 26, 1951, box 21, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

[18] Joseph G. Jorgensen, "Sovereignty and the Structure of Dependency at Northern Ute," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10 (1986), no. 2, pp. 81–82; Wilson Rockwell, *The Utes: A Forgotten People* (Denver: Sage Books, 1956), pp. 257–59; Paul Sanchez, "Development of the Northern Utes," Uintah and Ouray Agency, 1965, p. 5, photocopy in Indian Education Files, Office of the Education Coordinator, Ute Tribe Education Division, Fort Duchesne, Utah, hereinafter referred to as IEF/UTED.

[19] Jorgensen, "Sovereignty," p. 80; Sanchez, "Development," p. 5.

seven Indian students were failing. The principal reported that the Ute students refused to take part in gym classes, did not bring their supplies to home economics, and sat idly in core classes. A compilation of teacher comments about Ute students alleged that one-third of the students failed due to absenteeism, many refused to try or would not participate, some started school too late and could not catch up, some would not study, and at least one was "just plain lazy." In their comments on 68 Indian students, teachers made not one encouraging or positive statement. This trend continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[20]

Some white parents felt that their own children received a poorer education because the schools slowed the pace of learning to meet "the slower learning rate of the Indian children." Non-Indian residents believed that Utes failed primarily because of a poor attitude—they felt Utes did not want to succeed. Non-Indians theorized that the Indians had a history of living in squalor, associating hunger and poverty with a hunting and gathering economy. If Utes did not want to farm, it meant they did not want to improve their lives—they refused to replace their traditional economy with a "better" one.[21]

This "poor" attitude showed up at school. One researcher who talked with educators at Union High theorized that the teachers' prejudice against Utes came from the Ute children's resentment of them. One teacher said that the children spent all their time complaining about things that early Uinta Basin residents had done to Indians, apparently not realizing that these grievances had occurred only fifty years earlier. Being raised by parents and grandparents who had experienced prejudice and land confiscation in the Uinta Basin made these acts seem immediate to fifteen-year-old Ute students.[22]

But the Ute children of the 1940s and the early 1950s failed because they were hopelessly unprepared by the Whiterocks boarding school for the work demanded of them when they transferred into the public schools, and each year they fell further behind. Rather than encouraging graduation, the boarding school principal had just expected Ute children to leave and begin agricultural work when old

[20] Darrell D. Atkinson, "Educational Adjustment of Ute Indians Compared to the Mixed Bloods, and Native Whites at Union High School, Roosevelt, Utah" (master's thesis, Utah State Agricultural College, 1955), pp. 5, 25; Statements from the Teachers Concerning Indian Children in Union High School and Roy Adams to Charles E. Reed, December 10, 1951, box 21, Uintah and Ouray Miscellaneous Correspondence.

[21] Henrik G. Lundgren, "A Study of the Language Development of Ute Indian Children" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1969), p. 6; Atkinson, "Educational Adjustment of Ute Indians," pp. 28–32, 39.

[22] Ibid.

enough. The boarding school and the public schools theoretically taught the same thing, but records indicate that the boys had spent the majority of their time at Whiterocks caring for the school facilities and livestock, while the girls' education had consisted of cooking, cleaning, laundering, and sewing.[23]

Local residents and teachers thought the Utes failed due to laziness, but one observer, after speaking to the parents rather than to "people associated with the Utes," found that the Utes saw things differently. He believed that their children's education was very important to the Utes. Some felt that their children would succeed if they understood their social and physical environment in the Basin better, while others wanted their children to compete more effectively with whites in the cattle business. But he also found that some who had supported the transfer of their children from the boarding schools to the public schools opposed the move the next year, after their children experienced public education. Many Utes ultimately disapproved of the closing of the boarding school because it threatened their way of life by casting their children into a hostile environment where classes, teachers, and students assaulted their self-image daily.[24]

One student, recalling her days in the public schools in the late 1950s, corroborates these observations. Gloria Thompson said teachers wanted Ute children to be seen and not heard. She remembered texts that portrayed Indians as savages or red men and also stated that little or no communication existed between the schools and Ute parents. The Utes were used to the boarding school handling all aspects of their children's lives and were not accustomed to dealing with public school administrators and teachers. All these factors combined to make her feel as if she did not belong and could not be a part of the school system.[25] Thus, from the Ute point of view, students failed because the schools did not welcome them or try to meet their needs.

During the 1960s faculty at the University of Utah became interested in the problems of Ute students. The university maintained a counseling program at Union High School from 1961 to 1964, and graduate students wrote master's theses on Ute achievement, attitudes, and perceptions about education. The Utes' average daily attendance improved and grades in vocational and physical education classes rose,

[23] Superintendent's Report, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1914, 1921; Bob Chapoose, interview with author, April 14, 1988, for text see Gruenwald, "The Ute Indians."

[24] Gottfried O. Lang, "The Ute Development Program: A Study in Culture Change in an Underdeveloped Area within the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1954), pp. 335–40.

[25] Gloria Thompson, interview with author, April 14, 1988, for text see Gruenwald, "Ute Indians."

but overall the GPA of the Utes remained close to the D average of 1958. Ute grades in core classes stayed the same or even went down in some cases. One researcher concluded that the reason for these poor results was the relationship between the Utes' posture toward the non-Indian world and non-Indian attitudes toward Ute concerns. Ute students had to display a "withdrawal from white goals" for peer and tribal acceptance, and non-Indians showed "a lack of understanding and unwillingness to make constructive concessions" to Indian needs. This created a cycle in which the behavior of each reinforced the attitudes of the other.[26]

Some Utes echoed this view that the attitudes of the Utes were as much at the core of student failure as the attitudes of whites. Ute leader Conner Chapoose stated in an interview that Indian parents did not understand what went on in school, and because they did not understand the system they could not help their children. He also said that Ute parents openly wondered about the good of schooling in front of their children and conveyed a sense of directionlessness to them. Other Ute interviewees agreed that the parents were not supportive enough of their children's education and needed to get more involved.[27]

The children themselves felt keenly their failure to succeed in school, and they too blamed both the whites and the Utes. Indian students felt discriminated against by white parents and principals but also resented their parents' failure to care about their educational experiences. They knew they were failing but lacked the skills to catch up. With Ute values pressing them from one side and their failure to acquire a mainstream education pressing them from the other, Ute students felt lost and many dropped out of school.[28]

In the mid-1960s federal policy toward Indian education took a different sort of turn, one not dictated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The war on poverty fought by the Johnson administration sought to establish federal programs for children below the poverty line. The Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 provided funds to meet the special educational needs of low-income families rather than merely doling out money to school districts for their general operating budgets. New programs were to enrich offerings to the "educa-

[26] Phil E. Wennhold, "A Study of Academic Performance by Ute Children" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1967), pp. 14, 16–17, 23–27.

[27] Conner Chapoose, August 22, 1960, Duke #5; Marietta Reed, 1970, Duke #605; Katherine Jenks, July 23, 1970, Duke #606; Linda Pawwannie, September 17, 1968, Duke #371; all in the Duke Oral History Collection, Marriott Library, Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

[28] "Human Relations and Leadership Development Program," unpublished report, 1973, pp. 30–34, IEF/UTED.

tionally disadvantaged." Many Indians in the United States, including the Uintah and Ouray Utes, qualified to receive these funds.[29]

But one important area of continuity existed between the old Indian education policies and this new act: the federal government did not consult Indians about programs designed for them. Indian groups across the country objected, and several won the right to review Johnson–O'Malley programs. In addition, the National Indian Leadership Training program in New Mexico launched a campaign to educate Indian parents about ways to have an impact on local schools. The Navajos established a tribally run school in 1966 and in 1968 established the Navajo Community College—the first college to be directed and controlled by Indians.[30]

Utah school districts experienced this same surge in Indian activism. In 1969 the Ute Tribe and the University of Utah initiated a series of meetings to discuss local Indian education. A year later they created the Uintah Basin Educational Council, "organized and charged with the responsibility of developing a program to deal with the problems related to Indian education in the Uintah [sic] Basin." Between January and April 1970 forty-one non-Indians and thirty-five Indians met three or four times a month to identify problems and outline goals. Believing that conflict between whites and Utes constituted the main obstacle, the council attempted to create a dialogue between the two groups. During meetings small, mixed groups discussed issues such as the lack of effective reading programs for all students and the lack of sufficient communication between schools and parents and between students and teachers. The council targeted such problems as the adverse effects of labeling on the Ute students' self-esteem and the lack of Indian representation on education boards and committees. The council also emphasized the absence of teachers qualified to handle the special problems of a culturally mixed school population. They planned to devise new teaching procedures, improve relationships between the cultures, individualize the curriculum, and work toward increasing educational opportunities for both Indians and non-Indians in the basin.[31]

[29] Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), pp. 181–87.

[30] Prucha, *The Great Father,* 2:1102; Szasz, *Education and the American Indian,* pp. 185–96.

[31] The council referred to itself as the "Uintah" Education Council. Fred A. Conetah to D. E. Ostler, September 18, 1970; Ashel J. Evans, Superintendent to Urban/Rural School Development Program, U.S. Office of Education, September 14, 1970; Uintah Basin Education Council, "Design for the Improvement of Educational Opportunities," June 22, 1970; a full run of the minutes of all the January to April 1970 council meetings is available, as well as all the above documents as photocopies, in IEF/UTED.

Fred A. Conetah, 1924–80, was a member of the Ute Tribal Business Committee. From A History of the Northern Ute People.

But in September of that year both the Ute Tribe and the school districts had difficulty finding money to implement their plans. Fred Conetah, a member of the tribal business committee, wrote, "to date no projects have been funded." No records or accounts of the council exist to indicate whether it should be judged a success or a failure, but the council did achieve its most important goal: the members of the Ute Tribe and the residents of the school districts were talking to each other. The dialogue, although often acrimonious, continued in the years following.[32]

Along with this new dialogue came new tactics as the Utes began to directly confront the public school districts about policies that censured their culture. In 1972 West Junior High suspended seven boys because they wore long hair, violating a dress code. A few days after the incident occurred 204 Ute parents attended a meeting to plan a confrontation.[33]

The school district maintained that certain standards of cleanliness and proper dress had to be enforced or the school district would not be teaching children a proper way of life. Non-Indians felt long hair represented a rebellious and disruptive influence. Many white parents expressed concern that if Indians wore their hair long, their own children would want to as well. At least one regarded long hair as immoral; he felt it would lead to girls wearing short skirts, children using drugs, and other degenerate activities, until no education would take place in the schools at all. The Utes maintained that long hair was part of their culture and a symbol of pride, as well as a statement of group identity. The Utes maintained that hair length had nothing to do with education, and a dress code outlawing long hair seemed to target Indians. One Ute parent stated, "Education is more

[32] Conetah to Ostler, September 18, 1970; Evans to Urban/Rural School Development Program, September 14, 1970; Ute Tribe Education Division, "The Ute Indian Tribe Comprehensive Education Plan" (September 1983), pp. 81–83, IEF/UTED.

[33] *Uintah Basin Standard,* November 9, 1972.

important than keeping them home from school because of their hair."[34]

The battle eventually went through the district court system, and in 1974 the combatants reached a compromise. The school districts permitted Ute students to wear their hair long if they signed an agreement with the school district stating they would "braid, wrap and/or tie it with the dignity and pride of my people."[35] This debate over long hair illustrates the surge in Ute demands for increased participation in their children's education that came to a head in the early 1970s. Instead of retreating to the reservation as they might have in the 1920s and 1930s, the Utes began to stand up and challenge whites about what Ute children had to deal with in the public schools.

On the federal level, a Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education published the Kennedy Report in November 1969. It stated that public schools across America had failed to educate Indians properly. Finding that Indians achieved well below average and faced prejudice in school, "the committee insisted on increased participation and control by Indians of their education. . . ."[36] In 1970 President Richard M. Nixon called for a federal Indian policy of "self-determination without termination" that included educational, economic, and governmental goals. Known to educators as Title IV, the Indian Education Act of 1972 provided money for programs such as adult education, curriculum development, the development of new and innovative methods, and the training of Indian educational personnel and counselors. In essence the act amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to specifically include Indians.[37]

Ute participation in their children's public school education dramatically increased with the passage of Title IV. One of the most important new projects involved communication: counseling to augment communication between the schools and the Indian children and the establishment of parent advisory committees (PACs) to increase communication between parents and the schools. The Title IV counselor became responsible for advising Indian children who

[34] Minutes of meeting of Ute tribal members, parents, and the Uintah School Board, October 13, 1972; Bruce G. Parry, Division of Indian Affairs to Governor Calvin L. Rampton, October 26, 1972; David C. VanderKraats, Community Development Specialist, to Forrest Cuch, January 30, 1974; Lynn A. Raveston to Ashel Evans, Superintendent, October 19, 1973; Meeting Minutes, Long Hair Issue, September 13, 1973; Robert C. Chapoose to *Deseret News* and *Salt Lake Tribune*, n.d.; Ute Tribe Education Division to Dr. Walter Talbot, State Superintendent, October 20, 1972, IEF/UTED.

[35] Student-Administration Contract, West Junior High, 1974, IEF/UTED.

[36] Prucha, *The Great Father*, 2:1103–106, 1139–40.

[37] Ibid., 2:1140; Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, p. 198; Americo D. Lapati, *Education and the Federal Government: A Historical Record* (New York, 1975), pp. 45–47; Sharpes, "Federal Education for the American Indian," pp. 21–22.

had academic, attendance, and behavioral problems and for facilitating communication between the school and home. Title IV made mandatory the participation of parents; PACs were to conduct needs assessments to determine how Title IV money should be spent and to evaluate the programs once implemented.[38]

The Ute Tribe also used Title IV funds and their own funds to change what their children encountered in the classroom. A Ute history and culture course that began in 1967 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has operated under Title IV since 1972. Ute educational leaders also generated curriculum material specific to Ute culture. Despite such gains, one important factor in the implementation of Title IV stood in the way of greater success for the history and counseling programs: the core curriculum remained unaffected by changes made to accommodate Utes. For one-half hour Ute children learned that their culture had value, but for the rest of the day they confronted the same old curriculum that emphasized Euro-American history and presented negative stereotypes of Indians.[39]

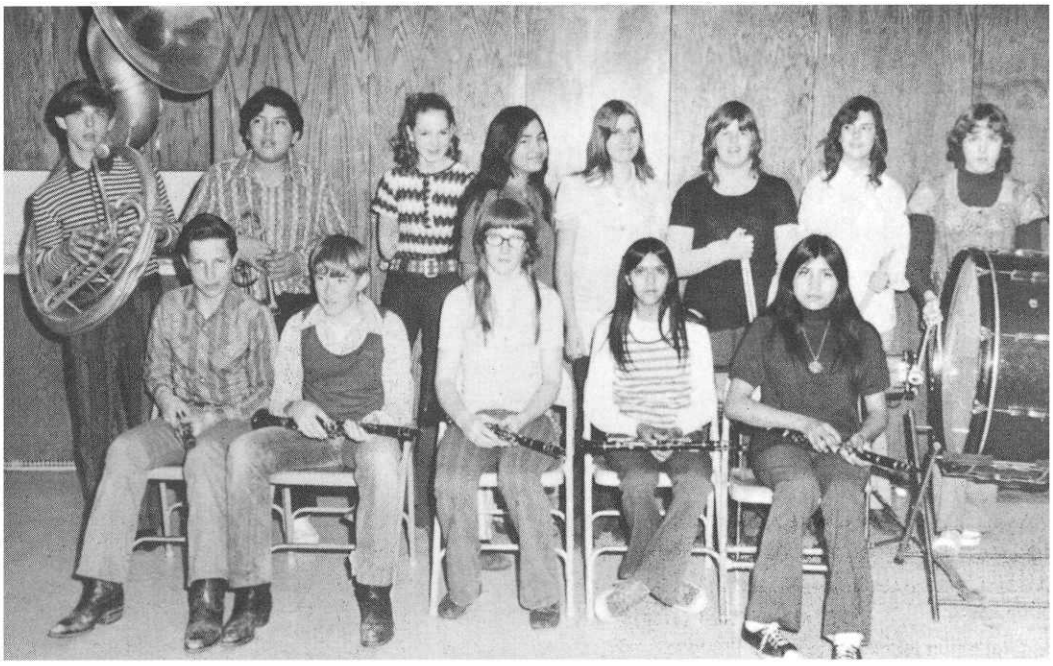
Beyond the negative images, students also had to deal with a value system at odds with their own. Betty Jo Kramer, a member of the Anthropology Department of the University of Utah employed by the Ute Tribe as an educational administrator in the early 1980s, observed that Ute parents voiced concern about the way public schools presented awards for scholastic and athletic achievement. The Utes felt that those who tried hardest should be rewarded; for example, rather than giving awards for finished artwork, teachers should emphasize the creative process that went into the production of art. Kramer felt that the Utes focused on process while the dominant culture focused on results, much to the detriment of the Indian students who emphasized personal commitment more than the end products that would result in good grades or awards.[40]

Other factors came into play as well. Educational leaders continued to report that Indian parents did not become involved enough in their children's schooling. In 1980 one report concluded that "Indian parents have a feeling of alienation from the white man's school system and view the school as a white man's institution over which they as

[38] Szasz, *Education and the American Indian,* p. 199.

[39] Norma Denver, interview with author, April 14, 1988, for text see Gruenwald, "Ute Indians"; Ute Tribe Education Division, "Ute Indian Tribe Comprehensive Education Plan" (1983), p. 6.

[40] Betty Jo Kramer, "The Dismal Record Continues: The Ute Indian Tribe and the School System," *Ethnic Groups* 5 (1983): 162–63.



Members of the West Junior High Band, 1972–73, from the school yearbook in USHS collections.

parents have no control."[41] A second problem involved the ratio of Indian students to white students. Most Utes attended Todd Elementary and West Junior High where they made up half of the student population. When they entered Union High, however, between 80 and 90 percent of their peers were white.[42]

Although Title IV programs did not work out precisely as planned, their implementation made the relationship between the Ute Tribe and the district more complex. During the summer of 1974 education coordinator Forrest Cuch wrote letters to the school district stating that the Utes' education division should have a role in evaluating Johnson–O'Malley personnel and input in how the school district spent the funds. In 1977 Cuch wanted to know why the school district did not ask the Ute Tribe to participate in the planning and implementation of the Uintah School District's teacher in-service training program entitled "Todd Elementary Unified Approach to Indian Education."[43]

[41] National Indian Training and Research Center, "Needs Assessment for Ute Education Department and the Uintah School District, 1978–79," p. 22, IEF/UTED. Wil Numkena, "Report on Indian Education Activities in the State of Utah," May 1978, p. 7, and "A Report on Indian Education in the State of Utah, 1979–80," June 1980, p. 9, Indian Education Files, Office of the Special Assistant for Indian Education, Utah State Board of Education, Salt Lake City, hereinafter referred to as IEF/USBE.

[42] National Indian Training and Research Center, "Needs Assessment," p. 9; Gruenwald, "Ute Indians," pp. 172–73.

[43] Forrest S. Cuch to Frank Andreason, Director of Pupil Personnel, July 23, 1974; Cuch to Andreason, June 21, 1974; Cuch to John Childs, January 26, 1977; photocopies in IEF/UTED.

By the late 1970s Ute achievement in the public schools had not risen significantly above the failures of the 1950s. Children at the elementary and junior high level still fell further behind their non-Indian counterparts in each grade. The 1977 graduating class contained only eight of the thirty-eight Utes who had begun in ninth grade four years earlier. An equal number of Ute students attended the Union High School and BIA secondary schools off the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, yet most of the small number of graduates had attended the BIA schools. Ute achievement continued to be low because many Indian students remained unprepared to perform needed school work at Union High School. In 1985, although over half the ninth grade class at West Junior High had failed English and a quarter had failed math, with a substantial number failing social studies as well, 96 percent of them continued to high school.[44]

Perhaps because of failures like these all over the country, a crucial transition occurred. American Indians concluded that the advisory role mandated by Title IV programs was not enough, and the federal government responded to new demands by giving tribes the right to administer Johnson–O'Malley programs themselves in 1977. The Utes took over that function the next year. The Johnson–O'Malley program had many of the same components as the Title IV program, but it also included teacher in-service training, head start curriculum, summer school, and youth leadership training. In the early 1980s Utes pushed to control Title IV, too.[45]

Unfortunately, records seem to indicate that the programs were poorly administered no matter who was in charge. In 1987 Roger Beckstead, the new elementary education director for the Uintah School District, reported:

> After reviewing the grant application for the 1986–87 year and the objectives contained therein, I feel it was never made clear to the Title IV staff the kinds of data they should be keeping in order to verify the objectives. Consequently, the data does not exist at this time to complete the report in what I consider an acceptable way.

Beckstead used attendance as an example. The objective stated that it was to rise 5 percent, but the Indian counselors told him they did not have the correct records. When Beckstead completed the report with

[44] National Indian Training and Research Center, "Needs Assessment," pp. 11–17, 33; Robert Chapoose, Title IV Counselor, pp. 2–7, IEF/USBE.

[45] Ute Tribe Education Division, "Comprehensive Education Plan," p. 15.

the data he had, including statistics on reading skills, he checked the box labeled, "50 percent or less of objectives were met."[46]

For its part, the federal government failed to enforce its self-determination policy. In 1986 the U.S. Department of Education audited the Indian education program in the Uintah School District, conducting an on-site visit complete with interviews. The auditor reported: "adequate progress toward achieving the goals of the grant" was in evidence, and "acceptable evaluative procedures are being followed."[47] The auditor reported these findings despite the fact that over half the Ute students failed a majority of their classes that year; the next year Beckstead felt compelled to note that the records kept were inaccurate and inadequate for evaluation to take place. Obviously there was little incentive for school districts to follow federal policy when those auditing the program rubber-stamped local efforts regardless of results. By 1986 the school districts had cut a Ute bilingual program and cut the Title IV counselor position to half-time as federal funds dwindled, and the core curriculum remained unchanged.

During the twentieth century, in the area of education, federal strategies have swung on a pendulum between assimilation and attempts to maintain Indian culture. Local white strategies have evolved from trying to exclude Indians from public schools, to inviting them in but not making them welcome, to participating in federal policies targeting Ute educational disadvantages. Local Ute strategies have evolved from retreat to confrontation in an attempt to change what their children encounter in school.

Despite changes, some things remain the same. Local whites continue to believe that Utes must change in order to become members of society. Some observers attribute this attitude to the influence of the Mormon church. For their part, local Utes have made forays into mainstream white society in terms of economic strategies but have not embraced mainstream schooling because the price is too high: the destruction of their culture.[48] In the 1980s local school districts did not allow Title IV programs to "taint" the core curriculum, and the Ute Tribe lobbied for the establishment of a separate, alternative Ute high

[46] Roger Beckstead to Whom It May Concern, November 19, 1987, photocopy in Indian Education Files, Office of the Elementary Education Director, Uintah School District, Vernal, Utah, hereinafter referred to as IEF/EED.

[47] Hakim Khan, Acting Director of Indian Education to Phillip E. Ellis, Superintendent, April 23, 1986, photocopy in IEF/EED.

[48] Kramer, "The Dismal Record," pp. 159–69; Jorgensen, "Sovereignty," pp. 75–94; Gruenwald, "Ute Indians," p. 219.

school and community college that would emphasize self-expression and long-term goals for the future of the Ute Tribe itself.

In this power struggle the school districts hold all the cards and have nothing to gain by changing the educational system. The Utes will settle for nothing less than the right to determine what and how their children are taught, but self-determination policies have proven impossible to enforce. The Utes, too, see nothing to gain in changing their position, because to them compromise means the end of their way of life.

While the local school districts and the Ute Tribe do battle, the casualties of war are Ute children. The one consistent trend in twentieth-century Ute education is the children's failure to receive an education. For employment by the tribe itself, Ute youths know that a white man's education does not count for much. Betty Jo Kramer concluded that to accept the school system's plan for them meant "separat[ing] themselves from mundane tribal life," while "failing . . . reaffirm[ed] their tribal identity."[49]

The opposing plans of both sides are clearly evident in two statements outlining the mission of a bilingual program for Utes. The Utah State Board of Education stated that:

> the basic purpose of the program is to teach concepts in the child's native tongue while developing the child's skill, knowledge and understanding of English. As soon as English is controlled, instruction in the child's native tongue is discontinued.

The Ute Tribe Education Division stated that their aim was to:

> retain and expand the use of the Ute language and preserve Ute cultural traditions. The primary intent of these projects is to strengthen self-concept and identity among Ute Indian youth and the Ute Indian community in general.[50]

The Utes believe that their tribe will not survive if their children are forced to abandon their essential Ute identity, and if that means their children fail in Uinta Basin schools, then so be it.

[49] Kramer, "The Dismal Record," pp. 163, 168–69.

[50] Elliot C. Howe, Coordinator of Bilingual Education to District Directors of State Bilingual Education Programs, August 23, 1977, in IEF/EED; Ute Tribe Education Division, "Comprehensive Education Plan," p. 21.